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ABSTRACT

By analyzing contemporary literature, this paper posits a federal role in what is seen as a trend toward "normalizing" college faculty positions and shifting control away from state and local jurisdictions. Three factors are seen as contributing to this shift. The first is the government's role in funding the hard sciences which has, in turn, created a culture of scholarship that rewards research and publication activities over more traditional faculty roles such as student moral development. Another change agent comes from court decisions that have held that faculty do not have an intrinsic right to be involved in institutional decision-making. In three cases--Minnesota State Board for Community Colleges v Leon Knight, Connick v Myers, and Ballard v Blount--administrators have successfully challenged concepts of academic freedom and tenure. Another shift has occurred in vocational education. While recent administrations have emphasized state responsibility for higher education, the strong federal presence in vocational education puts pressure on the performance and behavior of two-year college faculty. The paper concludes that federal money is creating a McDonald's hamburger-like sameness in higher education institutions and urges vigilance to protect variety and local flavor. (CH)

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The Development of a National Agenda for College Faculty: "McDonaldizing" Higher Education

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Abstract

The college faculty member position has historically held a position of great autonomy in both intellectual and work environment behaviors and norms. This trend has changed greatly over the past two decades, as a series of legislative and federal movements have worked, either intentionally or unintentionally, to standardize the faculty position. Through an analysis of contemporary literature and trends, this manuscript identifies the primary thrusts which currently work to "normalize" the professorate.

The college and university faculty member has traditionally had a great deal of autonomy and freedom in determining course objectives, workload, and even worklife. The concept of selecting the professoriate as a profession based partially on work lifestyle is common among faculty today and among the emerging scholars who will fill future faculty ranks. However, this trend may be changing, and this change may be directed from a seemingly most unlikely source: the federal government.

Colleges and universities are typically state or locally controlled, with exceptions being private or proprietary institutions. As such, most colleges and universities rely on state or local governing boards to set priorities and establish an institutional protocol and culture for involvement in decision making and in establishing what the constituency values. Typically, this governing board selects administrative personnel who will implement this vision for the state or local area, and who will communicate the board's and state's expectations to lower level administrators, faculty, and eventually students.

Faculty have shown resistance to this model. Kerr (1991) noted that at one point faculty resisted the efforts of governing boards in determining expected faculty behavior. Throughout the late-1960s and early-1970s, faculty joined students in protesting the authority of the institution to determine or mandate faculty and student behaviors and expectations. Despite this resistance, Kerr argued that faculty missed their "window of opportunity" to claim real power in determining institutional direction.

Subsequently, faculty interested in encouraging or implementing change have been directed to administrative career paths and have been, in a sense, forced to leave the faculty.

Despite this trend of institutional and state ownership of higher education, the federal government has slowly and quietly been assuming increasing levels of power and authority over higher education. Although federal legislation has often instigated and encouraged activities in higher education, such as the Vocational Education Act of 1963 or the GI Bill in the 1940s, federal policy and behavior in an informal manner is stripping state ownership of the institutions they fund. This paper will examine the federal movement toward a national agenda for higher education, and will conclude with my personal thoughts on this movement. The paper will be divided into a discussion of the federal government's role in creating a culture of scholarship in higher education, followed by the federal government's activities in dictating faculty involvement in governance. The paper will conclude with a brief discussion of current legislation.

On Faculty Research

From the inception of Harvard University in the 1630's, the higher education faculty member has played a number of roles on campus. The earliest Colonial College's relied on faculty to serve in the capacities of all business operations, student services, and academic programs and delivery. Faculty recruited students, supervised their academic and social growth, as well as

handling fund raising, budgeting, libraries, and all of the other business support services which have been "professionalized" in higher education.

As indicated, Clark Kerr (1991) discussed the evolution of the college environment, and particularly the death of in loco parentis as a key factor in the changes which have taken place on the college campus. Kerr argued that when colleges and universities relinquished their right to have a stake in the moral development of students, much of their autonomy and authority in operating the campus was diminished. Kerr went on to note that the activism which took place in the late-1960s and early-1970s allowed faculty to take on a larger role in the formation of institutional direction, but the role through which faculty gained a right to governance has gone largely unrealized and under-utilized. Kerr contended that the opportunity presented with this potential empowerment has passed, while faculty seemingly allowed for the increased professionalization of the campus environment.

The contemporary research university has been argued to be an outgrowth of Prussian education where research and development activities were vital to nationalism. With the creation of Johns Hopkins University in the United States, the contemporary graduate research university was created. This model of a research institution has identified research and publication as the primary activities for faculty. With an increase in research comes an increase in prestige and a subsequent increase in

resources, all combining to make a culture of scholarship desirable (Finnegan & Gamson, 1996).

The growth of the research university took root in the movements of the 1960s and 1970s when the focus on sponsored programs and research incentive funds led to the creation of a culture of scholarship (Finnegan & Gamson, 1996). This movement can be traced further to the Russian launching of Sputnik in 1951 and the United States' efforts to "catch-up." In the years following Sputnik, the United States federal government passed a series of legislative measures aimed at increasing the research and development activities in higher education institutions. This was the first peace-time directive to higher education, and the result was a Congressional conception that research, not teaching, is what is valued by the American people.

The majority of research and development money made available following Sputnik was for the hard sciences. Thus, colleges and universities found the hard science academic disciplines to be the "cash cows" which could fund other disciplines, such as the professional schools and soft social sciences. Over time, these soft social sciences have been expected to replicate the successes of the hard sciences, and research and publication in the professional schools and soft sciences has become the common expectation.

Efforts to balance the federal budget, coupled with a peacetime reduction in military research and development, has had an alternative effect on higher education. The culture of scholarship placed on higher education by the federal government is now reducing itself, as fewer federal dollars are flowing into the hard sciences. As the prestige and power of higher education have become equated with the hard sciences, fewer resources may result in fewer research projects and fewer publications. Subsequently, the soft sciences, which have become accustomed to following the hard sciences, will also change. The result will be a change in tenure and promotion guidelines and a change in the behaviors of faculty in all disciplines. This change could even spread to the preparation of future generations of scholars (Chronister, 1991). Indeed, the federal government, through the temptation of money, has manipulated, and is poised to again manipulate, higher education's expectations of faculty in determining the concept of quality.

On Faculty Participation

Faculty involvement in governance has received a growing amount of attention in both academic and private sector communities during the past decade. Due in part to the wide-spread acceptance of Total Quality Management in the private sector, the concept and rhetoric of shared authority has experienced a re-birth (Parker, 1991). This resurrection of interest in faculty involvement in decision-making may also be

attributable to what Bergmann (1991) referred to "bloated administrations and blighted campuses" (p. 12). Regardless of the motivation for re-addressing faculty participation in decision-making, a dilemma exists when considering the possible legal restrictions placed on faculty member's legal rights in decision-making and policy formation in higher education.

Although the arguments for involving faculty in decision-making are compelling (improved culture, greater acceptance of decisions, et cetera), few academic administrators or faculty leaders have considered the legal implications of shared authority. With the exception of several union movements to resist adding additional responsibilities to front-line employees without reciprocal benefit increases, the involvement of faculty in governance has been viewed as a faculty right rather than privilege. However, of special notice are three federal legal decisions which have the potential to greatly alter the entire format of shared authority in higher education, thus reinforcing the idea of a forced federal agenda for higher education.

Three primary legal decisions have held that faculty do not hold a right to be involved in institutional decision-making or policy formation, and that faculty can be fired for attempting to lobby administrators to decide on an issue. In the Minnesota State Board for Community Colleges v. Leon Knight case, Supreme Court Justice O'Connor held that public bodies do not grant employees the right to share in decision-making, and that in the case of colleges and universities, administrators hold the sole

power to develop and implement policy. This legal decision was confirmed in the Connick v. Myers and Ballard v. Blount legal decisions, both of which further restricted college faculty to teaching only, and barred faculty from even making changes in the curriculum they are responsible for teaching. Justice O'Connor further held that faculty specifically do not have the right to alter or amend any curricular item, such as a syllabus, reading list, or lesson plan without the express consent of the administrator with supervisory responsibility.

In the 1983 Ballard v. Blount decision, the U. S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia upheld the denial of a salary increase to a faculty member in retaliation for the faculty member's criticizing academic policy. In the same year, an Appellate Court held in Harry Connick v. Sheila Myers that faculty can be dismissed, regardless of tenure, for challenging and criticizing administrators and administrative decisions.

All three of these legal decisions demonstrate the judicial branch of the federal government's perception that higher education is extremely similar to other public agencies. By intervening in their operation and eroding the concept of academic freedom, the federal government has reinforced its ability to establish a national agenda which minimizes individual faculty cultures and creates a more "institutional" atmosphere where faculty expectations are similar in all public colleges and universities. This agenda continues to evolve despite the findings of Miller, McCormack, and Newman (1996) who reported

that faculty like to be involved in decision-making and in sharing authority, and this enjoyment results in a more collegial atmosphere where ideas are expressed more freely and a positive work environment is encouraged.

On Current Legislation

The Reagan presidency worked extensively to limit the role of the federal government in providing state-level services such as higher education. Aside from this eight year period where the higher education community was forced to fight with other public bodies for federal money, the Reagan administration did provide stable funding for military research and development. Beginning with the Bush administration, and particularly emphasized in the Clinton administration, the federal government through the Executive branch has emphasized state responsibility for higher education.

The Clinton administration, however, has worked extensively to increase the size, scope, and nature of vocational and technical education. While the Reagan and Bush administrations continually attempted to restrict federal monies for vocational education to secondary schools, the Clinton administration, in part through the strength of Secretary of Labor Reich, strongly encouraged and funded vocational education through community and technical colleges. Reich also demonstrated a great deal of legislative ability by gaining additional funding for the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Apprenticeship Centers so that

they could offer certificates and diplomas, previously only available in two-year colleges.

The results of these movements has been the increased reliance on federal money in two-year colleges to perform specific activities, regardless of state-based need. Training for displaced workers, GED programs, adult literacy centers, and so on are all located in two-year colleges because they received federal incentive funding packages. Subsequently, the Executive branch has used this idea of basic and remedial education and economic development to manipulate, to some extent, the grassroots thinking of community college constituents, and particularly the performance and behavior of two-year college faculty.

Conclusion

The federal government, through the executive, judicial, and legislative branches has clearly made efforts to control the behaviors of higher education institutions and their faculty. The result has been the institutionalization, or cleansing, of faculty. In a sense, the federal government is encouraging a sameness to all higher education institutions, a sameness similar to the McDonald's hamburger restaurants which have a very similar quality across the country.

Should the federal government continue unchecked by state legislators and state-level institution constituents, higher education institutions will continue trying to serve two masters

and will succeed at neither. The lure of easy federal money must be curved by specifying what colleges and universities are supposed to be doing, and who they are supposed to be doing this for. Additionally, higher education institutions must be careful in their development and review of tenure and promotion guidelines and in expecting faculty to be involved in governance activities. Institutional leaders must either fall prey to the machinery of the federal government, or become active in protecting their institution's needs for collegial shared governance and what constitutes a "good" faculty member at their institutions. Although the quality of McDonald's Restaurants is indeed the same in Tuscaloosa, Alabama as it is in Lincoln, Nebraska, the quality of higher education institutions in those two cities would perhaps be better maintained if the variety and local flavor can be protected within the institution.

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